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Revolutionaries, Wanderers, Converts, and Compliant

Life Histories of Extreme Right Activists

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Life-history interviews were conducted with thirty-six extreme right activists in the Netherlands (1996-1998). Becoming an activist was a matter of continuity, of conversion, or of compliance. *Continuity* denotes life histories wherein movement membership and participation are a natural consequence of prior political socialization; *conversion* to trajectories wherein movement membership and participation are a break with the past; and *compliance* to when people enter activism, not owing to personal desires but because of circumstances they deemed were beyond their control. Stories of continuity in our interviews were either testimonies of lifetimes of commitment to extreme right politics (labeled *revolutionaries*) or lifelong journeys from one political shelter to the other by political wanderers (labeled *converts*). Activists who told us conversion stories, we labeled *converts* and those who told compliance stories, *compliance*. The article presents a prototypical example of each type of career and suggests each prototype to hold for different motivational dynamics.

Keywords: *biographical continuity; conversion; extreme right; life-history interviews; Atlas.ti; political wanderer; neo-Nazi; identity; ideology; instrumentality*

During the early 1990s, the Netherlands, like many other European countries, experienced a rise of extreme right sentiments as witnessed—inter alia—by election results. These electoral successes triggered interest from academics and nonacademics, but little systematic investigation of those who organized and mobilized the extreme right. Who are these people who spend much of their time often at great cost (Linden and Klandermans 2006) for the extreme right cause? What drives and inspires them?

In an attempt to find answers to these questions, we interviewed thirty-six Dutch extreme right activists. A first interview round was held in 1996 after the elections of 1994, which put many of these interviewees into positions in city and provincial councils and the national parliament. The next elections in 1998, however, were devastating for the extreme right as it was literally destroyed as a political body in the Netherlands. Many of our interviewees lost their positions and were faced with how to carry on. To find out how they fared, we held a second round of interviews in 1999, with twenty-four of these activists.

We conducted life-history interviews. Life-history interviews are like travels through time as the interviewee is asked to go back in the past. In the course of the interview, the interviewer and the interviewee try to reconstruct a specific part of the interviewee's life. As our study concerned the interviewee's career in the movement of the extreme right, the first interview started with the question when and how the interviewee became involved in this movement. Subsequently, it moved to questions about what it is like to be actively involved in this field and whether the interviewee occasionally had considered quitting activism. The last question was the starting point of the second interview.

On the basis of the interviews, we distinguished four prototypical careers: revolutionaries, wanderers, converts, and compliants. For some, becoming an activist was a matter of continuity, for others a conversion, and for others a matter of compliance. *Continuity* refers to life histories wherein movement membership and participation are a natural consequence of preceding political socialization (Roth 2003). Continuity situates social movement participation centrally in the life course of the activist (Andrews 1991; Teske 1997). *Conversion*, on the other hand, refers to trajectories in which movement membership and participation were a break with the past. Often critical events play a crucial role in these life histories. Blee (2002), for instance, observed that the women she interviewed about their participation in the U.S. racist movement often referred to a dramatic personal experience (a car accident or being raped) that triggered the decision to engage in radical politics. In addition to continuity and conversion, there was a third pattern that we labeled *compliance* when people enter activism not because of their own desires, but because of circumstances that they did not always control.

Stories of continuity in our interviews were either testimonies of lifetimes of commitment to extreme right politics or lifelong journeys by political wanderers who went from one political shelter to the other. The interviewees who belonged to the first category, we labeled *revolutionaries* and those who belonged to the second we labeled *wanderers*. The activists who told us conversion stories all recalled events that changed their lives or

worldviews and made them susceptible to the appeals of the extreme right. We labeled them *converts*. Compliance stories usually tell about friends or family members who persuaded someone who did not feel particularly attracted to politics to become actively involved in the extreme right. We labeled these activists *compliers*.

A Note on Methods¹

Our life-history interviews lasted an average three hours and took place at a location of the interviewee's choice. All interviews employed the same interview scheme. The interviews were conducted by the first author. They were transcribed, coded, and analyzed in Dutch. Summaries and exemplary quotes were translated into English.

We selected interviewees from a list of organizations that we compiled of those that were indisputably perceived as extreme right, but stayed within the law.² Sampling from membership lists was not feasible, as such lists do not exist or were not made available to us. We interviewed people active at different levels in the movement who were diverse in gender, age, region, and other background variables. We oversampled female activists, responding to Blee's (2002) comment that research on right-wing extremism tends to focus on men. The actual sampling strategy was a mixture of snowball sampling and approaching potential interviewees at meeting places.

We interviewed activists who were actively involved in one or more of the parties or organizations that composed the Dutch extreme right of those days: the *Centrum Democraten* (Centre Democrats, CD), the *Centrum Partij '86* (Centre Party, CP'86), the *VolksNationalisten Nederland* (People's Nationalists Netherlands, VNN), the *Nederlands Blok* (Netherlands Block, NB), the *Nederlandse Volksunie* (Netherlands People's Union, NVU), and *Voorpost Nederland* (Vanguard Netherlands, VPN). The CD, CP '86, VNN, NB, and NVU were all political parties. The CD was the most moderate of the five. At its heyday, it had three members in the national parliament and many in provincial and city councils. The remaining four parties were more radical. None had members in the national parliament, but some did acquire scattered seats in city councils. The NVU and CP'86 were the most radical. Indeed, both parties came close to being outlawed. The latter actually was sentenced for being a criminal organization. Rather than waiting until their party was forbidden, members of CP'86 disbanded their party. The VNN and the NB were the offspring of the disbanded party. VPN was a meeting point of right-wing extremists, but unlike its Flemish counterpart, it functioned more as a think tank than as an action group.

One-third of the interviewees were actively involved in the movement for more than twelve years, one-third between five and eleven years, and one-third for four years or less. Some interviewees held positions in the party or organization, such as chairman, deputy chairman or board member of the party, or chairman or deputy chairman of a local branch or the youth wing of the party. Others occupied positions in politics such as with the city council or parliament. The average age of our interviewees was 42.7 years—the youngest was seventeen years and the oldest seventy-two years. Obviously, this is not a random sample but it broadly represents the Dutch extreme right.

Data were coded and analyzed with the help of a coding scheme that built on the larger theoretical framework for the study, organized around five core themes—socialization, critical events, entry, maintenance of commitment, and exit. We used Atlas.ti software for data analysis (Miles and Huberman 1984; Muhr 1997). Names used in this article are pseudonyms.

The Revolutionary

It is my goal [...] to create a space where one can discuss nationalism as a body of ideas, or revolutionary nationalism, or revolutionary conservatism... (Willem Laakman, thirty-three years, male, NVU/NJF/CP'86/VPN).

Willem Laakman is the typical revolutionary extreme right activist. He likes to think of himself as a revolutionary thinker; in his own words:

It should be possible to discuss and develop certain ideas and to contribute to the discussion. And perhaps, most important, to develop my own thinking. Every day and with every book I receive at home, I get new ideas and inspiration and make some progress. If I could disseminate that, communicate it to other people, that would be nice because at the end of the day, that would make it possible to discuss matters. In a way one feels proud, if one can contribute one's bit. That at a given moment one can say "see, that is what I helped put in place."

From age fifteen, Laakman was involved in many right-wing, conservative, and extreme right groups. At the time of the interview, he was president of the Dutch branch of VPN (Voorpost; Vanguard), of which he had been a member since 1984. In 1992, he founded the NB and since 1993, served as adviser to the board of CP'86. In 1996, Laakman was working to establish a think tank to develop ideas and to educate future officials, and visited regularly with Flemish and French colleagues.

Ironically, Laakman became interested in the extreme right at age fifteen when attending an exhibition of the Anne Frank Foundation meant to warn against new forms of racism and neo-nazism in the public library of his town:

I will never forget. And yes, there was all kind of information about neo-Nazism as it was called. Literally everything, including P.O. Box numbers and names. So I went to the reading room of the library to look for the various parties and organizations and found the address [of the NVU]. I wrote and received a package of information, I phoned a few times with the people. That's how one gets somewhere.

He joined the NVU as he felt attracted by the somewhat secret and mysterious character of that party, its extreme features that did not fit into the Dutch society of those days. Although Laakman remained in the NVU for years, he never felt comfortable since it was a small group of people primarily active in the Randstad (the area of the large cities of Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam) and not in his part of the country. Since he wanted to be actively involved and meet with people, he joined the Veterans Legion (another extreme right organization) that offered opportunities to actively participate. During weekends he could often be found in a stand of the Veterans Legion at the market of his town, excited by the protests it elicited by those passing by.

When a youth organization of the NVU (the National Youth Front, NJF) was founded, Laakman was asked (in 1979) to become a member. The NJF quickly became more radical than its mother organization, leading to serious conflicts and the formation of the Youth Front Netherlands (JFN) in 1982. Laakman became actively involved in this group and wrote most of its leaflets and papers before the many court cases against the organization for discrimination and disruption of public order scared him away and he joined Voorpost Nederland.

In the early 1990s, the board of Voorpost tried to unify the parties of the extreme right in the Netherlands into a new party, the NB. As Laakman explains, unifying the right was only one goal: "In fact, we wanted to have it as a fall-back option. In case CP'86 would be outlawed, we would have the Netherlands Block to replace it, as that is an ideal name." Yet, after a few meetings, Laakman concluded that the NB was moving in the wrong direction—"It looked like it would become a party on its own. That in fact it would be nothing more than yet another party"—and he quit.

Laakman was then asked to advise the CP'86 in Arnhem about running up for the municipality elections. He designed a reorganization plan for the CP'86 as a whole, to begin in Arnhem:

Then, I figured that internally the CP'86, in fact, was a great mess. I had a number of discussions with them and told them a lot needed to be changed in the party. I started a paper for the branch in Arnhem named "Arnhem's Pride." The first issue already looked much better than the national party paper; that made some people green with envy. Later I wrote a reorganization plan about all that should be done. That plan I sent to the national and all regional boards (in total twenty) and that only received positive reactions.

Laakman's work in Arnhem gained him an invitation to advise the national executive board of CP'86. He urged the party to democratize by making decisions at meetings composed of regional representatives, which resulted in more active involvement by members. Laakman also worked on the party's ideology, proposing a 'nationalistic concept' that was discussed at special meetings and, in 1993, a party platform. Interestingly, Laakman described his increasing involvement in an instrumental way: "I wasn't a member of CP'86 for the party per se, but because I have some ideas and I simply used the party as an instrument to work on those ideas." Laakman worked to develop a collaboration between CP'86 and Voorpost, but tried to remain behind the scenes for fear that being identified with the extreme right would damage his flourishing clothing business industry.

In 1996, Laakman decided to leave CP'86. After a failed merger with another party, CP'86 had reverted to what he described as its "old failures," such as expulsion of members and taking decisions without proper discussion. Although he was asked to become president, Laakman had lost trust in the party and its activists. He described two reasons for leaving:

Number one, I wanted to move on, because I was already on that line. I had written some six or seven brochures and wanted to accomplish a few things more. CP'86 had the potential to become party and movement in one. And I had the opportunity to build and expand that. Number two, I wanted to realize my ideas and build something but I didn't want to move ahead [...] while behind me everybody was breaking down everything that I had been building.

A third reason was the constraints he experienced when he tried to develop his initiatives. He wanted to get a "movement" going, make ideas discussible and acceptable, and leave party politics behind.

Party politics have everything to do with gaining votes, members, with conforming to the laws as political rules. And some measure of populism because one must appeal to people. That one little pigeonhole is so restrictive and so narrow for the people. A movement is never bothered by that, because indeed a movement can without any problem spread out a line of thought, express criticism, and develop things.

That spring Laakman was asked to become the chairman of Voorpost Nederland. In this role, he tried to develop new initiatives, such as an institute to train and educate cadre, an extreme right student association, and a retailers' association. Convinced that the "man in the street" would be interested in what he had to say, Laakman aspired to establish a movement. He explained:

Indeed, a movement is an overarching whole. Voorpost can be described as part of a movement. The largest part right now. This is the home, the base from which a number of things can be developed, a central point where people come back to meet. I see two possibilities: either you decide to disseminate your ideas through a political party, or you do it outside party politics through metapolitics. That is everything outside party politics. Whatever someone decides to do with it is his choice. But [establishing a party] is not necessary because everything you do might influence people, be it a student association or a letter to the editor. Eventually, we will see whether it is possible to create a way of thought or the openness to make nationalism as a way of thought possible. So that becomes a possible point of discussion. Right now it is already more discussible than before [...] That has of course its origins, it is not only because of us, it is also caused by developments in the society, thus some things are inevitable. But that's what you simply need that movement for.

Inside and outside the extreme right Laakman is considered someone who listens to reason. Indeed, he is one of the few activists who provided the press with information on a regular basis without putting himself in the spotlight. He is convinced that everyone should know about the movement he is part of.

Initially, Laakman experienced few aversive effects of his activities, both because he acted largely behind the scenes and because his profession was not widely known. This changed, however, in 1998 when regional newspapers published an article about his activities, based on a report in an antiracist paper. In our second interview in 1999 his activities appear to have had much more serious consequences than Laakman would have ever imagined:

The article gives the name of a shop, a name of a street, and uses the title "The nationalist shopkeeper." With quotes from van Donselaar [a Dutch sociologist, expert on the extreme right] such as "well, he is a stranger in their midst" or "a wolf in sheepclothing," or "one of the few smart and educated men." Okay, that's of course flattering (laughs). As such I could smile at it. Until then my activism hardly provoked any reactions. It was in the newspaper on Thursday. I was scared stiff. I had my heart in my throat. The day after I met my colleagues, who pounded on my shoulder and said such

things as “don’t let them grind you down” and “it is ridiculous that such things occur.”

At first, things seemed to blow over, but then the newspaper article began to have a life of its own. Laakman’s tax collector confronted him, his suppliers became aware of his activities in the extreme right, and his wife divorced him. He left his house, settled in the Randstad, and gave up his business.

I was put under some pressure by my ex-wife and by the manufacturer and the bank that didn’t want to give credit any more because they were uncertain about the future of the business although in the previous year I was 60-70 percent in the black.

After selling his business, Laakman became even more intensely occupied writing leaflets and organizing training for cadre of the extreme right.

The Wanderer

I just wanted an ordinary, broad nationalistic movement. Not only of political parties, but plainly, let’s say an intellectual movement like the liberal movement or the socialist movement in the Netherlands. (Chris Van Tongeren, fifty-six years, male, CP/CD/NB/VPN]

Van Tongeren’s long journey through the Dutch political landscape was a search for the broad, nationalistic movement he was never able to find. This stamps him as the typical wanderer. The journey began with the youth organization (FJG) of the social democratic party (PvdA) and ended with Voorpost.

My mother had always been a dedicated voter of the social democratic party, thus that is what I got from home and that is the first station I nosed around. So I went to the FJG, but noticed that what the PvdA was telling to us did not really appeal to me, certainly not if someone came to talk about South Africa, then I thought “my opinion is 180 degrees different.” But in those days, it was more or less common to follow your parents’ choice initially.

Van Tongeren stayed a member of FJG, and later PvdA, despite disagreements on many issues because he could not find the “broad, nationalistic movement” he was seeking: “What has always annoyed me in the existing political groupings and movements in the Netherlands is that [nationalistic]

thought is seriously underrepresented.” About 1975 he left the PvdA and became occupied with family, school, and work. When he finished his studies and had time again to read, he found a series of articles in a Dutch magazine about a “national consciousness movement.” From that time onward, he used his discretionary time

to nose around in politics [...] I figured that Janmaat and Brookman [two founders of the CP] were working on something that appealed to me. Somewhat national-conscious, but not extreme right. Of course, Janmaat was immediately accused of “moving things in the wrong direction” or god knows what. But that wasn’t my opinion at all. I found that things moved absolutely in the right direction. Janmaat indeed appealed to a more nationally conscious attitude. The Netherlands must first stand for Netherlanders and that, of course, has everything to do with frittering away Dutch interests to the multi-culture or big business or both.

Interested in the newly founded Centrum Party (CP), Van Tongeren phoned Janmaat and attended a meeting in Amsterdam. It was his first meeting of the new political current but he felt it was “now or never”: “We start something new and thus we must try to make it work right away.” To his surprise, the CP’s expectation that it would receive regular, serious, and objective treatment by the press, turned out to be not true. “It has been predominantly negative. We have underestimated the far-reaching indoctrination of the Dutch population.” In 1981 Van Tongeren became a board member of the CP. For the first time he agreed with the body of ideas of a party. But he was amazed that nationalism evoked such a negative image in the Netherlands: “I did not know that nationalism was such a taboo in the Netherlands. [...] I still do not understand, because in my view it may not be a taboo at all.”

Until 1984 Van Tongeren was secretary of the CP. When it split, he sided with Janmaat who founded the CD, but he felt that Janmaat had stolen his idea to create a party and could not make it work:

I could have founded the CD, the name even came from me, but with more neutral people, not the typical Janmaat clique. [...] I had a specific governance concept that would have been possible with that party, with the CD, as it were to become a regular party with wards and branches and so on. My board, and I we kept the rules as they were written in the statutes and the bylaws, but the one who time and again systematically violated the rules was Janmaat, not the branches or the wards. Janmaat deliberately frustrated any build up and that I hold against him until today.

Eventually, in 1994 Van Tongeren got into a serious conflict with Janmaat. He began to work with the NB as a way to continue his political activities but, once again, he became disillusioned:

Well, what failed in the CD failed again and even more in the NB. The same story again. It was impossible to get a normal administration. If you want to build a party you must encourage chapters to meet. You must be prepared to delegate, you must be prepared to make people responsible and also to give account. Well, that was lacking in the CD. A general board must review the policy. The general board consists only of timid weasels. And the NB was still in its infancy, hence that cannot be compared.

In both the CD and NB, Van Tongeren's dreams were shattered by the leaders' unprofessional attitudes and lack of administrative capacities. It was not ideals, he felt, but greed that drove them:

All those clubs have a captain on a little boat and that frustrates the whole movement, because too many of those men who are at the top of those parties are primarily interested in their personal well-being—the seat in the parliament and the retention of that seat of Janmaat. Loyalty he [Janmaat] interprets as personal loyalty to him through thick and thin, despite his whims and tricks.

After all his work, Van Tongeren's political activism did not bring what he expected:

I am now sixteen years involved in all this and at some point you realize: there is no progress, there is only pulverizing. Janmaat doesn't want anything, in fact Vreeswijk [leader of NB] doesn't want much either. To be sure, he wants to pull in people, but to extend the party—not really. That makes you feel down-hearted. Not so much because of the witch-hunting by the outside world, but because of the incompetence of the leading figures.

Yet, Van Tongeren remained faithful to his ideals, wanting

an ordinary, broad nationalistic movement. Not only of political parties, but plainly, let's say an intellectual movement like the liberal movement or the socialist movement in the Netherlands. ... I find that the "Netherlands must stay Netherlands," especially culturally but also in its landscape. If you look at it, you wonder what is the Netherlands doing? We are chock full, but there is nothing we can do. Certain activity must of course exist, but what you see, a livable country that is also pleasant for the future

generations and a Netherlands' Netherlands that retains its own character, that is a Netherlands that belongs to its own people and that is preserved for them and not squandered to groups of immigrants who would like to come here.

It is not likely that Van Tongeren will quit completely, if only because he has sacrificed already too much for his activism. The last time we spoke to him (in 1997) he was affiliated with Voorpost and trying to start a magazine for the extreme right.

The Convert

I got no help at all, and if you then see that those foreigners get everything, well, then you feel at some point a hatred so big... (Matthijs van Veen, sixty-one years, male, CD).

Van Veen's "conversion" to extreme right politics stemmed from anger about how he was treated by the Dutch social security system. After a career first as a marine and later as a sailor, he was not able to work because of a heart problem. Since disability payments in the Netherlands are much better than in Great Britain—where he and his British wife had settled—the couple returned to the Netherlands. This turned out to be a major disappointment. When he moved to the U.K., he lost his right to disability payment in the Netherlands and it took several years before matters were fixed. Twenty years later it still made him angry. He could not understand why "he, as a Netherlander returning from abroad, is left to fend for himself, while all foreigners are supported wherever possible." It pushed him toward extreme right politics early on. He voted for the CP and the CD from the very beginning and was a follower of Janmaat. He saw his experience repeated in that of many others as reflected in the continuation of the opening quote of this section:

... and if you see what misery occurs to divorced women who come to the Social Security office to ask for a washing machine and who don't get one and that the Somali who lives next door gets everything and brand new. At some point, people can't take that anymore. Increasingly, people come to the CD, the only party that in the end tries to do something.

It is no surprise that van Veen's striving was to "*expel foreigners from the country*," although he qualifies his statement somewhat

... of course, if they work then I don't mind, like that Gümus [a Turkish illegal immigrant who, after many years, was sent back to Turkey with his family] who has been expelled, eh, I didn't agree with that. That man could have stayed, he had built a business, his children were at school here for many years, they should have let him stay...

But drug dealers and refugees deserve no mercy. According to him, the mosque in his neighborhood was used for storage of drugs and weapons and all refugees were economic refugees, profiteers who take advantage. These beliefs fueled his activities in the extreme right, as did his impression that "a growing number of people stand behind these ideas. Look, that gives a bit of satisfaction, yeah, that increasingly people agree with you."

Although van Veen felt that he sacrificed a lot because of his activities for the CD, his personal bond to the leader of the CD, Janmaat, kept him going. When this bond began to erode, van Veen's commitment to the CD began to wane. In 1998, shortly after the municipal elections, we interviewed him again. He had withdrawn from active politics and begun to lose his faith in Janmaat as a leader, but still spoke of him as a friend. In the interview he responded to a rumor that Janmaat has asked a pedophile to join the party.

I don't go into that anymore. I don't want it anymore. I can't cope with it any more. Politics is one dirty business, heh, and if I make myself nervous about it, I take in on myself. [...] Look, if Janmaat continues to do such stupid things [that] people will say "what are we doing?" Look, we stick our necks out to make the party big, and then he goes on to play those stupid tricks. I talked it over with him occasionally, but then he simply says "I think I do well." Ehm yes, then there is little more to say.

A year later we interviewed van Veen for the last time. He was very disappointed and embittered because of Janmaat who he described as "a useless son-of-a-bitch who promises all kind of things but does not keep his promises." Van Veen and a friend were promised a 5th and 4th position on the list of candidates for the parliamentary elections but were ignored.

Well, I know quite a few people who all have quit. Who have all been treated badly by Janmaat. Oh well, I told him once firmly the truth; he was still to come here with his wife and dog, but he didn't come; phoned that his wife was ill, or so. Well, and all those things, all the stories I heard ... It made me decide to stop.

Obviously, his friendship with Janmaat was over. But van Veen still believed in the ideas of the CD.

The Compliant

I feel, of course, responsible because it is my man's party. To be sure, I am on his payroll, but at the same time he is my man and to your man you don't say no that easy. (Paula de Jong, forty-four years, female, CP/CD/NB).

Although Paula de Jong was not initially interested in politics, she was gradually pulled into it through the activities of her husband, who was active in the extreme right since 1982. At the beginning, she was busy with her two handicapped sons, but when they entered school, she became increasingly dedicated to her husband's political career by preparing and distributing flyers, accompanying him to meetings of the city council, and eventually by becoming his assistant in the city council. This gradual involvement in politics makes her a typical example of a compliant:

If I were just his assistant and not married to him, I would at a certain moment say that I wanted a week rest. But then you see him doing it himself, so what are you to do? You help again ... because I don't have a job where I have to go, there are always moments that I can do what I want. I always find little holes. Then, I sit here reading with the washing machine on, you know.

This is not to say that she did not like the work. Rather, it was the social aspect, the contacts with people that she felt most attracted to.

The political-technique side of it—to phrase it that way—is not my greatest hobby. It is the people. That was already true in the old parties (CP and CD). The people who were sitting at your table with all their stories, what they have experienced. Yeah, in fact, I did it for those people. Not very idealistic, as far as I am concerned. I have few idealistic motives; I should perhaps have more, yeah.

De Jong felt that she lacked the expertise for the work in the council committees and was afraid to fail. But what she really liked was her work for “Utrechts Herstel” (Utrecht's recovery), a foundation she and her husband established. Following the example of the Flemish Block, they distributed questionnaires door-to-door about safety in the neighborhood, the presence of foreigners, the policy of the municipality, and so on, and visited those who returned the questionnaire. De Jong regarded these visits as the most important aspects of her activities for the party and the foundation as she got to know what was going on in the neighborhoods. She used this information in the council committee meetings:

In practice the Dutch people are escaping from some neighborhoods. And what do you see then? The foreigners stay behind. And they have different opinions over cleanness in those countries, thus it becomes here in the neighborhood a pigsty. This afternoon in the committee I have tried to do something. I didn't say that it was a mess where those foreigners are, no, I just mentioned the names of the streets and said: "in this and that street it is extremely filthy, wouldn't it be possible to have waste-baskets at the edge of the area and on the squares between the buildings?"

But she did not get much response from city council.

Paula de Jong had other bad experiences in the extreme right. In 1998, a meeting of extreme right organizations in Kedichem was disrupted when members of the countermovement threw smoke bombs through the windows, setting curtains, and subsequently the hotel, on fire. People panicked and, in the chaos, several were seriously wounded, among them, de Jong's husband. Earlier, in 1984, at a meeting in Boekel that she attended, smoke bombs also set a meeting place on fire. She managed to escape through the meadows:

For a long time I didn't attend any meeting. Kedichem I didn't feel like going to as it would last the whole day ... In the evening at seven, the phone rang and somehow said, "the hotel is on fire, blah blah blah." I could only scream, "where is [my husband], where is [my husband]?" Well, by then he was already in the hospital. They had to drag him down senseless. That was a commotion. So I am not very eager to go to meetings, I mean, thus far I have only been the dupe of them.

She described her time in the movement as time and again a disappointment:

[Eventually] you trust nobody. People are coming to help you like that woman in Utrecht. At some point I felt like something is wrong with that woman. Afterwards it turned out that she was a member of an antiracism committee. But you notice it, I am not stupid. If someone all the time asks "who is that?" you become suspicious. Rightly so, with the benefit of hindsight. But in the meantime she has been around for months. That gives an odd feeling. It makes that you hardly dare to have board members any more.

De Jong was equally unhappy about neo-Nazis. Had she known that some had an "interest in German groups," she would have been "much less relaxed with them in [her] kitchen." Neo-Nazis and CP'86 are all the same: "rotten Nazi-mess." And the slogan "Netherlands white" goes against the grain with her, not the least because of her husband's Moroccan customers.

De Jong developed a thorough dislike of Janmaat, which increased when her husband was expelled from the CD. The expulsion was a dramatic event, because her husband was for a long time seen as the “crown prince” of Janmaat. But like many activists who in Janmaat’s eyes became too successful, he was ousted in a rude manner. What remained was mutual hatred and envy.

Paula did not feel that her life dramatically changed when she became openly politically active: “look, because of my husband’s position, I was already isolated. I did already have few friends.” Yet, she did feel a difference in how people treated her:

Before, they were nicer to me, you know! People who now got to know me and figure who I am, don’t want me anymore. And really, meanwhile they don’t greet me anymore when I come across them. They are with me, a member of a committee, and then I see them in a shop and they turn away or turn red and don’t say anything. Very cowardly, in essence. In some committee meetings I am attacked, but because I am not a council member I can’t defend myself. I can’t return anything. I then feel hurt, so offended. You get home all worked up. I try to do my best in my life and I don’t deserve such treatment, but I do get it.

It made her very angry sometimes:

Furious, awfully furious. They dare to tell me that I am asocial, I mean, fascist in their eyes. And look what they are. Is that normal?

Moreover, when she applied for a job some years ago, she was told that she wouldn’t get it “because of the political background” of her husband.

Paula was aware that her personality changed as a consequence of her political activism. She found herself becoming more aggressive and saw that happening to other people in the movement. She described being lonesome, as people never stay long in the party. It is hard to bond to someone: “at some point, it is just the two of you and that is a fairly lonesome life.” She could cope with the fact that she and her husband experienced the consequences of their activism, but became furious when her children were bothered at school:

“Your parents discriminate,” one recently said to Max [her son]. I told the teacher “I hope Max can take it.” Because Max already is worrying about the

death of his younger brother [his brother died recently] and now this. [Max] is a mentally handicapped child ... well, that is so awful, I find that criminal, that parents set their handicapped child up [Max attends a school for handicapped children]. That has happened before, yeah, and Max is a child that finds it difficult to defend himself ... He is not even able to read the materials we are busy with, he has no clue. There's no need for that either in my view, a child must be kept out of this. It is a different world. But yet he is pestered with it.

Perhaps because she was pulled into politics, de Jong felt sometimes tired of political activities:

Other people have a job, their work, their spouse or friend, but I don't have such excuses, so even when I am sick and tired of everything, I don't want to say "no." Because you're at home, you know, and if you must choose between washing the dishes, cleaning the toilet, or doing something for the party, you choose the latter. Everything else is left all the time, the things you meant to do yourself.

Conclusion

The four life histories reflect fundamentally different trajectories. Revolutionaries, wanderers, converts, and compliants are prototypical activist careers which vary in the dynamics of participation. The differences can be found in the pathway to activism, in the type of involvement, and even in the type of disengagement. Klandermans (2004) distinguishes three fundamental motives to participate in social movements: instrumentality—someone wants to change a social or political state of affairs; identity—someone wants to engage with like-minded others; and ideology—someone wants to express a view. The differences between the four types can be described in terms of these motives.

For revolutionaries, the movement is an instrument to change the world and to meet with other combatants. They have strong ideological motives and identify with others who nourish the same ideology. If there were no such others, they would carry on nonetheless. In fact, they shape the movement. If the organization in which they participate fails, they go on and establish new organizations or take other responsibilities on themselves. Wanderers are primarily looking for others who share their ideology. They are looking for political homes and constituencies of identification. If the organizations to

which they adhere fail to deliver, they disengage and look for other political shelters. Converts suffer wrongs and are angry. It is not so much ideology that drives them. Movements are instruments to express their anger and to meet with other sufferers who share that anger. They are in the movement to fight injustice. They quit when they discover that others in the movement are there for their personal agendas and careers and not to fight injustice. Compliers predominantly identify with others in the movement. They participate as long as these people continue to be involved and carry on despite misgivings. There is little ideology behind such participation. If participation is instrumental at all, it is to maintain friendships or relationships with other participants.

Obviously, individual participants combine prototypes, although the same prototypes might be more prominent for some people. The same holds for movements. So, what brings people to the extreme right? The answer differs depending on which trajectory activists have taken. For revolutionaries and wanderers it was ideals, beliefs about a better world—whether nationalist or antimulticulturalist; for converts, it was discontent, revenge on unjust authorities; for complainers, it was, perhaps, the inability to say no.

Although our study concerned the extreme right, we believe that the same prototypes can be found in other movements. Each movement may have idealists who want to fight for a better world, the disconcerted who feel neglected and abandoned, and the complainers who feel trapped. So far, there has been too little systematic research of such activist careers to assess whether in other movements, similar types of activists exist. Exceptions are Andrews (1991), Blee (2002), Teske (1997), and Roth (2003) who conducted life-history interviews for such different movements as the extreme left, women in organized racism, the environmental movement, and women in the labor movement respectively. Systematic studies of extreme right activists are even rarer. Blee (2002), Billig (1978), and Bjørgo (1997) are the only three we are aware of. Klandermans and Mayer (2006), to our knowledge, are the first to compare life histories of extreme right activists in different countries.

The life-history approach is not employed very frequently to study movement activists. Yet, it does generate important insights. It looks for explanations of current activities in the individual's past. The choices made in the past, the (critical) events that mark a personal trajectory through his or her life put a stamp on the acts of today.

Notes

1. See Klandermans and Mayer (2006) for a more detailed discussion of the methods employed.
2. The selection was based on consensus among commentators, watchdog organizations such as antifascist organizations, reports of internal affairs, and experts. We excluded underground organizations, skinheads, and some others on the radical fringe.

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